



# Policing Education Qualifications Framework – frequently asked questions

## 1. What is a qualifications framework?

It is a system which credits equivalent levels of learning and expertise and enables employers and education providers to recognise and compare individuals' achievements. The UK framework regulated by OfQual describes nine levels (see below). The most commonly recognised qualification tends to be used as a label. For example, Level 3 is often described as being equivalent to A-levels and Level 6 as equivalent to a degree.

<b>Level 8</b>	Recognises leading experts and practitioners in a field. Learning involves development of new creative approaches that extend existing knowledge or practice, often contributing regionally or nationally.
<b>Level 7</b>	Recognises ability to create original responses to complicated and unpredictable problems and situations. Demonstration of high level of specialist professional knowledge.
<b>Level 6</b>	Recognises use of an individual's own ideas or research in response to complex ill-defined problems or situations. Advanced levels of knowledge required.
<b>Level 5</b>	Formulation of responses to complex problems and situations and evaluation of results. Demonstration of high levels of knowledge and expertise applied to defined complex problems.
<b>Level 4</b>	Recognises specialist learning and detailed analysis in an area, with review of methods, actions, results.
<b>Level 3</b>	Gain and apply a range of detailed knowledge, skills and understanding to well-defined problems.
<b>Level 2</b>	Gain good knowledge and understanding of a defined subject area and perform varied tasks with guidance.
<b>Level 1</b>	Basic knowledge and skills to complete routine tasks and ability to apply learning with supervision.
<b>Entry</b>	Basic knowledge and skills to carry out simple familiar tasks and follow instructions.

## 2. Why should policing have a formal qualifications framework?

Professions support their members and help assure the public that discretion is exercised appropriately by setting clear conditions of membership. These commonly include the use of a published specialist knowledge base, commitment to an ethical code, keeping up to date with professional development, and meeting an educational standard verified by nationally recognised qualifications. In policing, three of these elements of support for professional decision-making have been introduced by the College of Policing. Policing does not, however, currently set education levels for roles or ranks which reflect the skills and knowledge required to meet current and future challenges.

Initial members of the College have stated that they want their professional body to develop national standards and to ensure that their learning and expertise will receive external recognition. Introducing a qualifications framework would meet this demand and provide assurance that those working in policing are qualified to a consistent standard.

### 3. What level of qualifications might people working in policing expect to reach?

Some categories of police staff role, such as human resources, have their own qualifications frameworks, while appropriate levels need to be proposed for police-specific roles such as PCSOs, call handling, and investigators. One of the few national qualifications currently available to police constables, the largest group in the police service workforce, is set at Level 3. The College has examined the qualification levels alongside its recent analysis and reviews and reached the view that Level 6 is an appropriate reflection of demand on constables (see below). Those specialising and in managerial roles might expect to attain Level 7 or 8 qualifications, the equivalent to a master's degree or PhD.

	Level 3	Level 6
<b>Problem solving</b>	<b>Apply established approaches to solving well-defined problems</b> and show emerging recognition of the complexity of associated issues	Apply transferable skills and problem solving strategies to <b>a range of situations and to solve complex problems; and exercise personal judgement in a range of situations</b>
<b>Personal responsibility and decision-making</b>	Qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring <b>some self-directed activity</b> with broad guidance and evaluation and responsibility for quality of output	Qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring <b>the exercise of initiative and personal responsibility and decision-making in complex and unpredictable contexts</b>

### 4. So what would someone working in policing do if they wanted to achieve a qualification?

The answer would depend on the level they wanted to reach. For example, if they were a police constable with 20 years' service wanting to achieve a degree-level qualification, the first step would be for their existing learning and expertise to be accredited by an education provider such as a university working with their force. The College is intending to develop national standards for this accreditation process, to make it consistent. The next steps toward obtaining the qualification would depend on what additional evidence of their advanced levels of knowledge and skill was needed by the awarding body. They might research and write up one or more original pieces of work, attend workshops or seminars and take part in debate and discussion, create and give presentations, or put together and present a portfolio of work-related material.

### 5. What is the evidence for qualifications at this level being useful?

In addition to being transferable for individuals, there is evidence from US research that Level 6 qualification might help meet future demand and have other potential benefits. US police forces who introduced a similar requirement, found officers were better at dealing with complexity and used force more appropriately.

### 6. Will everyone in policing now have to be qualified?

No, this is a professional development opportunity for those already working in policing, if they wish to gain recognised and transferable qualifications.

## 7. Aren't police officers already qualified?

There are many highly trained and experienced people working in policing. The profession does not, however, currently set education levels for roles or ranks which reflect the skills and knowledge required to meet current and future challenges. There is variable and inconsistent practice in terms of police education, with the result that some officers have no publicly recognised qualification.

Such inconsistency risks undermining the professionalism of the police service. For most professions, a nationally recognised system of accreditation demonstrates that individuals have the required knowledge and skills for their role and thereby offers assurance both to the public and to the members of the profession itself. The police service remains considerably out of kilter with other professions, particularly those who work to protect the public, with regard to its formal education standards.

## 8. Aren't you downplaying the skills and competence of existing officers and staff?

No, quite the opposite. The police service already benefits from a highly skilled workforce. The PEQF will offer the opportunity for that to be formally recognised.

## 9. Isn't this about introducing graduate entry in the end?

The first priority is creating a system of recognition for the existing workforce. This will involve agreeing benchmarks for officer and staff learning and expertise with the higher education sector. Some police forces have already started this process and introduced a practical policing degree as part of recruitment. To help with national consistency, the College needs to consider whether and how people nationally might reach Level 6 which equates to degree-level entry. This could be either before entry or through a higher level apprenticeship entry route, whereby people could reach a Level 6 qualification while working in policing.

## 10. Is policing really a graduate level job? Surely you don't need a degree-level qualification to break up a pub fight?

If that was the only requirement for policing, then a Level 6 qualification would not be appropriate. Police officers, however, have to exercise personal judgement and responsibility, and solve problems in complex, unpredictable contexts of all kinds, dealing with everything from child sexual exploitation to counterterrorism.

## 11. Isn't having common sense and a vocation more important than qualifications in policing?

People in policing need to demonstrate commitment and exercise good judgement, whether or not they have a qualification. Achieving a qualification does not prevent someone having common sense or a vocation for public service. A qualified person might feel able to challenge a majority view, which has previously been accepted as common sense, if it contradicted the best available evidence. The College view is that people working in policing are best equipped with a combination of advanced knowledge, skills and decision-making frameworks to support them in their vocation and in exercising their personal judgement.

## 12. What value does being a graduate bring?

Graduate-level skills and attributes (eg, critical thinking and analysis, communication skills, reflection, independent decision-making, problem solving in complex and unpredictable contexts and research skills) are already demonstrated on a daily basis by current members of the service, and will become increasingly important in policing. Such skills will be essential in embedding evidence-based policing and will also support a highly skilled workforce capable of working more autonomously and efficiently with less supervision.

A graduate qualification allows the public and other employers to easily recognise and compare the level of expertise officers and staff. It may also prove useful for when those who currently work in policing retire, or if they decide to leave the service.

Higher education can also play a vital role in supporting the development of skills such as tolerance, willingness to embrace alternative perspectives, moral and ethical reasoning, and empathy.

### 13. Could seeing policing as a degree-level profession put people off?

The College is not aware of evidence which supports this idea. A higher level apprenticeship entry route would allow people to gain qualifications while earning a salary. Qualitative research with people from minority ethnic backgrounds and education statistics, tends to suggest degree status might increase minority ethnic representation in policing. Some 23 per cent of degree students are from minority ethnic backgrounds but 13 per cent of the UK population and only 5 per cent of the police workforce are from the same minority ethnic backgrounds. The College would be interested to see research on the views of people from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds. Statistics suggest people from disadvantaged backgrounds are increasingly likely to obtain Level 6 qualifications.

We recognise the PEQF and associated graduate entry routes would mean the financial burden of initial training would be passed onto individuals in line with other professions. As part of implementation, the College would review current funding options for individuals including schemes for bursaries, scholarships, and loans for those with difficulty in accessing education or for those from disadvantaged or under-represented groups. Further options might include some form of ‘training’ salary. The College intends to work closely with forces, the Home Office and higher education providers to ensure that adequate options are provided to prevent any negative impact on the diversity of entrants to policing. Other concerns will also be key considerations within the programme of work to implement the PEQF. These include the possible impact of national variations in the cost of living and the implications for mature joiners or those with carer responsibilities that might potentially restrict applications. A full Equality Impact Assessment will be conducted to resolve or mitigate all identified risks.

### 14. What will be the entry routes for someone seeking to become a police officer?

The College is currently proposing three entry routes for standard entry into the police service at the rank of constable – a professionally focused undergraduate degree in policing, a graduate conversion programme (for existing graduates in non-policing disciplines) and higher level apprenticeships which would allow individuals to earn while gaining their degree-level qualification.

Entry routes	Qualification timing	Training period
Professional degree in policing	Pre-join and self-funded (via student loan)	Approximately three years but could vary depending on the mode of delivery (eg, part-time)
Graduate conversion programme	Post-join available to graduates only	To be determined but likely to be approximately six months
Higher level apprenticeship	Post-join	To be determined but likely to be from three to five years. Will enter as an apprentice constable and will study for degree and work concurrently.

Direct Entry routes are available for entry at superintendent level and will soon be available at inspector level. These routes will be linked to Level 7 qualifications.

### 15. Would an individual studying for a degree on entry be guaranteed employment?

No, the individual would still have to go through the normal recruitment process. The College will be consulting with forces and key partners as to how to effectively align that process and study requirements.

## 16. How will national consistency in delivery be maintained?

In each of the above entry routes, the College of Policing, as the professional body, would set the national standards and requirements to ensure national consistency and standardisation. Universities and forces would work in partnership to design, deliver and assess each programme.

## 17. Does the PEQF also apply to police staff?

Yes it does, although there is no suggestion of a requirement for a degree for all roles. Some police staff will already have access to role-specific academic qualifications through professional bodies relevant to their role, for example, the Chartered Institute for Personnel and Development (CIPD) for HR and Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) for finance. There is, however, an intention to offer similar academic qualification opportunities to police staff in 'policing-specific' roles such as intelligence, investigation and call handling. The ultimate aim is to establish an inclusive framework that integrates and aligns all police officer and staff roles. Given the enormity of this task, the intention is to phase developments with the initial priority being police officer qualifications.

## 18. We are concerned that the police in some areas are not fully representative of the communities they serve. Is there not a danger that the requirement to hold a degree and the cost of study may reduce that representation even further?

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## 19. Does the one-size fit all approach work? How will degree students learn the local context of policing?

It is envisaged that the national standard' component of the degree entry route will comprise around 70 per cent of a full degree and the requirement to meet those standards will ensure national consistency. The remaining 30 per cent of the degree will offer forces and higher education institutions (HEIs) the flexibility to design modules to meet the demands of local variations, specialisms or needs. The programme will be updated to ensure that candidates are equipped to meet the changing nature of crime in their region and further afield.

## 20. Who are the College of Policing consulting on this?

The College is in the early stages of development of the PEQF – consultation and other forms of engagement are a key part of our initial work. We recognise that comprehensive and ongoing consultation with a range of key stakeholders is essential to help ensure that the PEQF meets the needs of the service and the public that it serves. We intend to consult as widely as possible both within and outside policing. Further details of how you can comment or get involved will be made available as the work develops.

## 21. What are the timescales for introduction of the PEQF?

The initial priority is to create a mechanism for the existing workforce to gain qualifications should they choose to do so. Specific timeframes are still to be agreed but it is recognised that a project of this magnitude and importance will take a number of years to implement. As such, graduate-level entry to policing is unlikely to be implemented before September 2019.

## 22. I am thinking of joining the police. What degree should I study for in the meantime?

Some universities already work in partnership with local forces and offer qualifications as a pre-entry route into the service, but at this time it is not possible to offer any guidance as to what qualifications will be recognised on a national basis. One of the proposed entry routes will, however, be a conversion course to enable those with qualifications in other disciplines to join.

Further information and regular updates will be made available on the College of Policing website throughout this programme of work.

## 23. Will enhanced qualifications mean that the police are paid more?

While the consultation document includes a comparison of the starting salaries for different professions, setting the level of pay for police officers and staff is the responsibility of forces and the Home Office.

## 24. Who can I contact for further information?

Further updates will be posted on the College of Policing website as this work progresses. Any questions can be forwarded to [PolicingEQF@college.pnn.police.uk](mailto:PolicingEQF@college.pnn.police.uk)